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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees

The following is the text of the Message of the Holy Father Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2019, to be held this coming 29 September, on the theme: “*It is not just about migrants*”:

Message of the Holy Father

It is not just about migrants

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Faith assures us that in a mysterious way the Kingdom of God is already present here on earth (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 39). Yet in our own time, we are saddened to see the obstacles and opposition it encounters. Violent conflicts and all-out wars continue to tear humanity apart; injustices and discrimination follow one upon the other; economic and social imbalances on a local or global scale prove difficult to overcome. And above all it is the poorest of the poor and the most disadvantaged who pay the price.

The most economically advanced societies are witnessing a growing trend towards extreme individualism which, combined with a utilitarian mentality and reinforced by the media, is producing a “globalization of indifference”. In this scenario, migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become emblems of exclusion. In addition to the hardships that their condition entails, they are often looked down upon and considered the source of all society’s ills. That attitude is an alarm bell warning of the moral decline we will face if we continue to give ground to the throw-away culture. In fact, if it continues, anyone who does not fall within the accepted norms of physical, mental and social well-being is at risk of marginalization and exclusion.

For this reason, the presence of migrants and refugees – and of vulnerable people in general – is an invitation to recover some of those essential dimensions of our Christian existence and our humanity that risk being overlooked in a prosperous society. That is why *it is not just about migrants*. When we show concern for them, we also show concern for ourselves, for everyone; in taking care of them, we all grow; in listening to them, we

also give voice to a part of ourselves that we may keep hidden because it is not well regarded nowadays.

“Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!” (*Mt 14:27*). *It is not just about migrants: it is also about our fears*. The signs of meanness we see around us heighten “our fear of ‘the other’, the unknown, the marginalized, the foreigner... We see this today in particular, faced with the arrival of migrants and refugees knocking on our door in search of protection, security and a better future. To some extent, the fear is legitimate, also because the preparation for this encounter is lacking” (*Homily in Sacrofano*, 15 February 2019). But the problem is not that we have doubts and fears. The problem is when they condition our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant, closed and perhaps even – without realizing it – racist. In this way, fear deprives us of the desire and the ability to encounter the other, the person different from myself; it deprives me of an opportunity to encounter the Lord (cf. *Homily at Mass for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 14 January 2018).

“For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same?” (*Mt 5:46*). *It is not just about migrants: it is about charity*. Through works of charity, we demonstrate our faith (cf. *Jas 2:18*). And the highest form of charity is that shown to those unable to reciprocate and perhaps even to thank us in return. “It is also about the face we want to give to our society and about the value of each human life... The progress of our peoples... depends above all on our openness to being touched and moved by those who knock at our door. Their faces shatter and debunk all those false idols that can take over and enslave our lives; idols that promise an illusory and momentary happiness blind to the lives and sufferings of others” (*Address at the Diocesan Caritas of Rabat*, 30 March 2019).

“But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight” (*Lk 10:33*). *It is not just about migrants: it is about our humanity*. Compassion motivated that Samaritan – for the Jews, a foreigner – not to pass by. Compassion is a feeling that cannot be explained on a purely rational level. Compassion strikes the most sensitive chords of our humanity, releasing a vibrant urge to “be a neighbour” to all those whom we see in difficulty. As Jesus himself teaches us (cf. *Mt 9:35-36*; *14:13-14*; *15:32-37*), being compassionate means recognizing the suffering of the other and taking immediate action to soothe, heal and save. To be compassionate means to make room for that tenderness which today’s society so often asks us to repress. “Opening ourselves to others does not lead to impoverishment, but rather enrichment, because it enables us to be more human: to recognize ourselves as participants in a greater collectivity and to understand our life as a gift for others; to see as the goal, not our own interests, but rather the good of humanity” (*Address at the Heydar Aliyev Mosque in Baku*, 2 October 2016).

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father” (*Mt 18:10*). *It is not just about migrants: it is a question of seeing that no one is excluded*. Today’s world is increasingly becoming more elitist and cruel towards the excluded. Developing countries continue to be drained of their best natural and human resources for the benefit of a few privileged markets. Wars only affect some regions of the world, yet weapons of war are produced and sold in other regions which are then unwilling to take in the refugees produced by these conflicts. Those who pay the price are always the little ones, the poor, the most vulnerable, who are prevented from sitting at the table and are left with the “crumbs” of the banquet (cf. *Lk 16:19-21*). “The Church which ‘goes forth’... can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24). A development that excludes makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. A real development, on the other hand, seeks to include all the world’s men and women, to promote their integral growth, and to show concern for coming generations.

“Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all” (*Mk 10:43-44*). *It is not just about migrants: it is about putting the last in first place*. Jesus Christ asks us not to yield to the logic of the world, which justifies injustice to others for my own gain or that of my group. “Me first, and then the others!” Instead, the true motto of the Christian is, “The last shall be first!” “An individualistic spirit is fertile soil for the growth of that kind of indifference towards our neighbours which leads to viewing them in purely economic terms, to a lack of concern for their humanity, and ultimately to feelings of fear and cynicism. Are these not the attitudes we often adopt towards the poor, the marginalized and the ‘least’ of society? And how many of these ‘least’ do we have in our societies! Among them I think primarily of migrants, with their burden of hardship and suffering, as they seek daily, often in desperation, a place to live in peace and dignity” (*Address to*

the Diplomatic Corps, 11 January 2016). In the logic of the Gospel, the last come first, and we must put ourselves at their service.

“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (*Jn 10:10*). *It is not just about migrants: it is about the whole person, about all people*. In Jesus’ words, we encounter the very heart of his mission: to see that all receive the gift of life in its fullness, according to the will of the Father. In every political activity, in every programme, in every pastoral action we must always put the person at the centre, in his or her many aspects, including the spiritual dimension. And this applies to all people, whose fundamental equality must be recognized. Consequently, “development cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well-rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man” (SAINT PAUL VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 14).

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God” (*Eph 2:19*). *It is not just about migrants: it is about building the city of God and man*. In our time, which can also be called the era of migration, many innocent people fall victim to the “great deception” of limitless technological and consumerist development (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 34). As a result, they undertake a journey towards a “paradise” that inevitably betrays their expectations. Their presence, at times uncomfortable, helps to debunk the myth of a progress that benefits a few while built on the exploitation of many. “We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved. They are an occasion that Providence gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more united country, a more fraternal world and a more open and evangelical Christian community” (*Message for the 2014 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*).

Dear brothers and sisters, our response to the challenges posed by contemporary migration can be summed up in four verbs: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. Yet these verbs do not apply only to migrants and refugees. They describe the Church’s mission to all those living in the existential peripheries, who need to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated. If we put those four verbs into practice, we will help build the city of God and man. We will promote the integral human development of all people. We will also help the world community to come closer to the goals of sustainable development that it has set for itself and that, lacking such an approach, will prove difficult to achieve.

In a word, it is not only the cause of migrants that is at stake; it is not just about them, but about all of us, and about the present and future of the human family. Migrants, especially those who are most vulnerable, help us to read the “signs of the times”. Through them, the Lord is calling us to conversion, to be set free from exclusivity, indifference and the throw-away culture. Through them, the Lord invites us to embrace fully our Christian life and to contribute, each according to his or her proper vocation, to the building up of a world that is more and more in accord with God’s plan.

In expressing this prayerful hope, and through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Way, I invoke God’s abundant blessings upon all the world’s migrants and refugees and upon all those who accompany them on their journey.

From the Vatican, 27 May 2019

FRANCIS